

forces to conduct combat operations farther inland than ever before.”

Kelley, who served as the Policy and Strategic Division Chief, U.S. Central Command, said that OIF displayed the interdependence that characterizes American military forces.

“The ability to harmonize the powerful capabilities of our air, naval, ground,

special operations, and space forces and bring them [together] for sustained combat gives the U.S. a tremendous edge,” Kelley added.

As the I Marine Expeditionary Force stormed across the line of departure and into the combat zone March 20, many units met little or no opposition, since the enemy either fled or surrendered to

the attacking Marines. Some ragged Iraqi soldiers had been stuck on post for months at a time with no support, additional supplies, or specific orders. Seeing the Americans come their way was enough to prompt them to surrender.

By March 25, sandstorms slowed the onslaught of attacking U.S. forces. U.S. warplanes continued to bomb the country relentlessly, and the ground forces took the opportunity to regroup and restock supplies for the push farther inland. As the storm ended, key targets in and around Baghdad were heavily bombed.

On March 31, after sitting 50 miles outside Baghdad for several days, I MEF finished off two Iraqi Republican Guard divisions and readied themselves for the push into the capital city, which began April 2.

On April 4, the Saddam International Airport was captured and renamed Baghdad International Airport, in what many people have referred to as the symbolic end of the war. By April 9, with virtually no sign of Hussein’s Baath Party still intact, thousands of Iraqis celebrated by dancing in the streets and destroying a tall metal statue of the former dictator. U.S. Marines helped the people destroy the statue as the Iraqis

chanted pro-American sentiments late into the evening.

On April 15, the city of Tikrit was captured by Marines, officially ending the control of Hussein’s regime. By April 19, Marines began pulling out of Baghdad and were replaced by soldiers who have controlled the city during the rebuilding process to this day.

On the morning of May 1, the Commander in Chief looked like his Naval Ace father and former president George H.W. Bush as he landed a jet aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln, announcing the end of major battle operations in Iraq.

As we celebrate our 228th birthday this year, many of our brothers still patrol the streets of Baghdad. The freedom we enjoy and for which many of us have fought is intact because of the sacrifices made in cities and countries many of us have never heard of before. While many of us complain about standing long duties in air conditioned buildings, Marines deployed in combat zones often stand duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week in the hot desert sun. Remember those Marines as you celebrate this year. It is the sacrifices of the few and proud that make life better for all of us.



Special to *The Boot*

After only 26 days, the coalition forces succeeded in liberating Iraq in what President Bush called, “One of the swiftest and most humane military campaigns in history.”